

Missions, Evangelism and Social Action.

By Fr. Archer Torrey

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Dear Father Dae:

When our group visited Jesus Abbey during the holidays, a few months ago, you were talking about the special role of the Korean church in world missions. I wonder if you would enlarge on that in more detail. The few hints that you dropped were tantalizing: I need to know more, especially since I am now in seminary and thinking of offering myself for the foreign mission field after I have been ordained.

After a long, hard winter, I hope you are enjoying the spring weather! Even here in the concrete jungle we can tell that there is spring out there, somewhere!

Sincerely yours,
Kim Song-jin

Dear Brother Kim:

Thank you for your letter. I really don't know how all our guests survived the cold weather last January and February. We didn't think we were prepared for so many, and several times people had to sleep in the common room, and we had to end the Thursday night meeting early so people could go to bed. Somehow the Lord kept us supplied with yon t'an, gas, oil, and wood and we all stayed reasonably warm. Of course, we had to wear a lot of clothes. One time we ran out of rice, but one of the guests brought a sack of rice in time for the very next meal! The Lord continues to work his miracles every day. I am sure it is the prayers of many people in other parts of Korea and overseas that keep Jesus Abbey functioning. There is no other explanation.

You asked about my remarks with regard to Koreans and missions. One thing I remember saying was that in so many parts of the world the colonial powers were Christian and because of their exploitation of the people in the colonies those people have a very bad taste with regard to Christianity. It's like what Paul says in Romans 2:24, "The name of Christ is blasphemed because of you." Mohammedanism arose because of Roman Christians oppressing the people of the Middle East and North Africa, and Communism arose because the Christian employers oppressed the factory workers and Christian landlords exploited the sharecroppers and farm laborers. Korea has never had an empire and has never had a reputation for oppressing anyone else. The role of the Christians in Korea since the earliest days has been to struggle for freedom and human rights. Thus Koreans respond to Christianity in a way no other Asiatic people do. This also means that when Koreans go as missionaries to the Third World, they are accepted much more readily than Americans or Europeans. At the same time, there is another interesting

by-product of Korean history: the Korean “diaspora.” Like the Jews of St. Paul’s time, who were spread all over the world, Koreans are spread all over the world in this, the twentieth, century. Brazil has 60,000 Koreans with 42 churches, Uzbekistan has 183,000 Koreans with 35 churches, Russia has 107,000 Koreans, Kazakhstan has 103,000 Koreans with at least 7 churches, Tajikistan has 13,000 Koreans with at least one church. Kyrgyzstan has 18,000 Koreans. I can't find the figures on the number of Korean churches, but the other ethnic minorities (Germans, Russians and other Turkic people) do not seem to be included in the Protestant church figures, so I would guess that a high percentage of the 2,000 or so Protestant Christians are Korean. They are divided into 8 different denominations! In Mongolia there are also many Koreans. There are 7 different groups of Christians in Mongolia and there is a real need for unity among them. A good start on preaching the gospel can be entirely ruined if the Christians are not one. Jesus prayed that all the believers would be one “as we are one, that the world might believe that you have sent me” (John 17:23). This is true in the other countries, too. We must start praying right now, earnestly, that the different Korean churches in these countries will love each other and strengthen each other.

Of course, there are over 2,000,000 Koreans in China (mostly in Manchuria) and about 20% are Christians. In God’s world there are no accidents! God has sent these Koreans to these hard-to-evangelize countries to do what no other missionary force can do.

What the Korean churches in South Korea must do, right now, is to send as many Christian businessmen, doctors, teachers, engineers, and craftsmen as possible to these countries to bring renewal and fresh vision to the Korean churches there and then, together with them, to evangelize the indigenous population in each country.

They won’t even have to worry about two or three years of language study before they can start work! Most of the Koreans there will already speak the language. The newcomers’ job will be to mobilize them!

With regard to language study, of course, there is a special logic in Koreans going to these Ural-Altaic peoples of Central Asia, as their languages are actually related to the Korean language and are much easier for Koreans to learn than for Europeans, Americans, or Chinese. The little bit of Turkish I studied in preparation for going as a missionary to Central Asia proved to be a good head start on learning Korean, when I came here instead of where I had planned to go.

Korean Christians can begin, right now, to find job openings in these countries (many of which are closed to “missionaries” as such) and start work. There are also advantages to special training and I would like to recommend something. As far as I am aware, the best missionary training program is the two-year course at Bethany Missionary Fellowship in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. That fellowship was originally started by 8 couples. I would like to see the big churches in Seoul send 8 couples to Bethany for training and then help them, when they return, to set up a training center here in Korea along similar lines. Most of the coalmines have closed down in the Taebaek area, and I believe a good location could be bought cheaply and buildings put up with a minimum of expense, and a training center started in Taebaek. We at Jesus Abbey would be thrilled to cooperate with such an undertaking. In time, we dream of a conference center in the area where weeklong seminars can be conducted on every kind of theological, Biblical and social issue. This would provide the students at the missionary training center with access to outstanding lecturers from all over the world. Also, if they

bought an old coalmine their fuel problems would be solved – all the fuel they need right under their feet, not to mention caves to hide in, in case of persecution breaking out!

This program would be primarily for “tent-maker” missionaries, people who already had skills at book-keeping, handicrafts, iron work, welding, construction work, mining, oil field work, shop-keeping, restaurant work, dry-cleaning, office work, banking, building maintenance, care of orphans and handicapped people, railroading, trucking, and so on! There are openings in all these fields in all these countries. The training center could also serve as a clearing-house for information about the Korean communities in these various countries and about the job openings in each country. If the Lord sends you some travel money, you could get tourist visas to these various countries and check up, even now, and bring us back at least a preliminary report on the situation so that we could start praying more intelligently. Once we started doing this, the Lord would begin to move. Many of our prayers are too vague. The more specific our prayers are the more God can use them.

As the trainees completed such a program and began to fan out to the Ural-Altaic peoples, to China and Manchuria, to Brazil and to many other countries, they could work with the already-existing Christian communities in each place and increase their missionary effectiveness. We have ties with a technical college in Manchuria, just over the line from North Korea, where we are reaching North Koreans as well as Kyo Po. This is a door to evangelizing both North Korea and China that is open now.

Another aspect of this calling from God for Koreans to evangelize Central Asia is that most of the Turkic countries in Central Asia are nominally Moslem. Koreans working in those countries could learn new approaches to Moslem evangelism. So far, the many agencies working among Moslems are having very heavy going. No one has yet found a break-through for Moslem evangelism. The Koreans, with no involvement in either ancient or modern exploitation of the Islamic world, might not only gain an easier hearing than anyone else, but might even discover the key to successful evangelism among these peoples. I want to lay it on the heart of the Koreans working in Saudi Arabia to try to understand the Islamic people, to learn Arabic, (much more difficult than Turkish, I’m sorry to say! – though it is related to Hebrew!) and try to win people to Jesus right there in the heart-land of Islam. If you get fired, then join a construction or pipeline company working in Central Asia! The fact that you have been in Arabia and know some Arabic will make people sit up and take notice! It is breath-taking to think of the exciting opportunities before the Christians of Korea. We could see, in the next ten years, the greatest missionary movement in history!

With all my emphasis on “tent-making” missionaries, I do not want to give the impression that there is no work left for the theologically trained, salaried missionary. Many countries need leadership-training programs of all kinds. They have vigorous churches but almost no trained leadership. There is a place for our educated people to go and help them. There are also other time-consuming types of work that “tent-makers” cannot do efficiently. This includes social work – hospitals, clinics, orphanages, relief work of all sorts--on the one hand, and Bible translation work, on the other hand. There is a need for full-time translators for the thousand or so languages into which the Bible has not yet been translated.

There is also a tremendous need for literacy evangelism. Even in those countries where the Bible has been translated and published, a high percentage of the population, especially the poor, cannot read. One of the reasons there is so much violence in American cities is illiteracy! Someone was interviewing a gang leader in an American city who was bragging about his arsenal of guns and about how many shootings and robberies he and his gang had taken part in. The interviewer, at the end, asked what was the thing he would most like to have. The hard gangster suddenly grew soft and almost cried as he said, "To be able to read!"

There is one thing that Korean missionaries, in any country, must guard against: our habit of putting the educated man, especially the ordained minister, on a pedestal. Non-Christians tell us that the arrogance of the Korean clergy turns them off. If that is Christianity, they want no part of it. Arrogant attitudes go back to pagan Korean customs that have crept into the church. They are a sort of negative "indigenization." They have nothing to do with the Bible or the teaching of Jesus. Korean missionaries must take Jesus' teaching about washing one another's feet, about being servants not masters, about being brethren not teachers, seriously. When they go to a country where there is already an existing church, they should work humbly with that church, neither trying to take it over nor competing with it. They should encourage and strengthen the local Christians to evangelize their own country as soon as possible. When they set up seminaries and training institutions, they must set an example of humility and servanthood. There is an old saying, "Your actions speak so loud I can't hear your words." If we teach the Bible without living by the Bible, no one will hear our words, and those who emulate our example will have a destructive influence on the churches in those countries.

Let us return for a moment to the problem of evangelizing Islam, as well as the communist-oriented people in so many countries. We must not think that, because communism seems to have failed in Russia, that it is dead. The poor people, the exploited people all over the world are still filled with bitterness and anger. They tend to put their hope in some sort of communism. There are guerilla movements keeping South America, Asia, and Africa in turmoil. Jesus said he came to preach good news to the poor (not the middle class). He said that the oppressed people would inherit land, that is, receive it as their right, not have to buy it. The Bible teaches that the land belongs to God and that every family should have their own piece of land so that they need not be slaves of anyone, but free and independent, able to develop the talents God gave them and to do the work for which he created them. Some people call this "the social gospel" and think it is only related to "liberation theology." The Bible has thousands of references to justice and judgment, to poverty and oppression. The God of the Bible is presented as the God of the poor. Islam arose because Mohammed proclaimed, "The land belongs to Allah" and the landless masses of North Africa and the Middle East overthrew the Christian landlords who were keeping them in poverty, illiteracy, and disease. If our missionaries will tell the poverty-stricken masses of Asia, Africa, and Latin America that the land belongs to God and that doing God's will on earth includes finding a system for giving everyone access to land, this would bring hope to millions of miserable people.

Since Islam has gone back on its promise (just as the church has) such an introduction to Jesus might just be the door to reaching the poverty-stricken masses of the Muslim world. We must not be "dumb dogs that cannot bark" (Isaiah 56:10) any longer. We must say what the good news for the poor is, namely, that God intends everyone to have land, to be free, and that this begins in the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, in the church. We must plant churches where we live

in community and share everything. The first few chapters of Acts (and the first chapter of 1 John) make it abundantly clear that it was the koinonia that was the major factor in the rapid rise of Christianity among the masses in Jerusalem and that it was related to the rise of such churches as Corinth, which was composed mostly of poor, uneducated types (I Corinthians 1:26-31). It was the mission to the poor that won the Roman Empire for Christ. It was the abandonment of the mission to the poor that brought about Islam and Communism. It is time to return to Peter's and Paul's and John's principles of mission and to recapture the world for Jesus! The Korean church has a special role to play in this task. Hallelujah!

Sincerely yours.
Dae Ch'on-dok

[Fr. Torrey's vision of a missionary training center in Taebaek is on the verge of being fulfilled in the effort to build the Three Seas Training Center at Jesus Abbey's Watershed Grange farm, and the work of the Fourth River Project, preparing for the opening of North Korea. Editor: October 2004]